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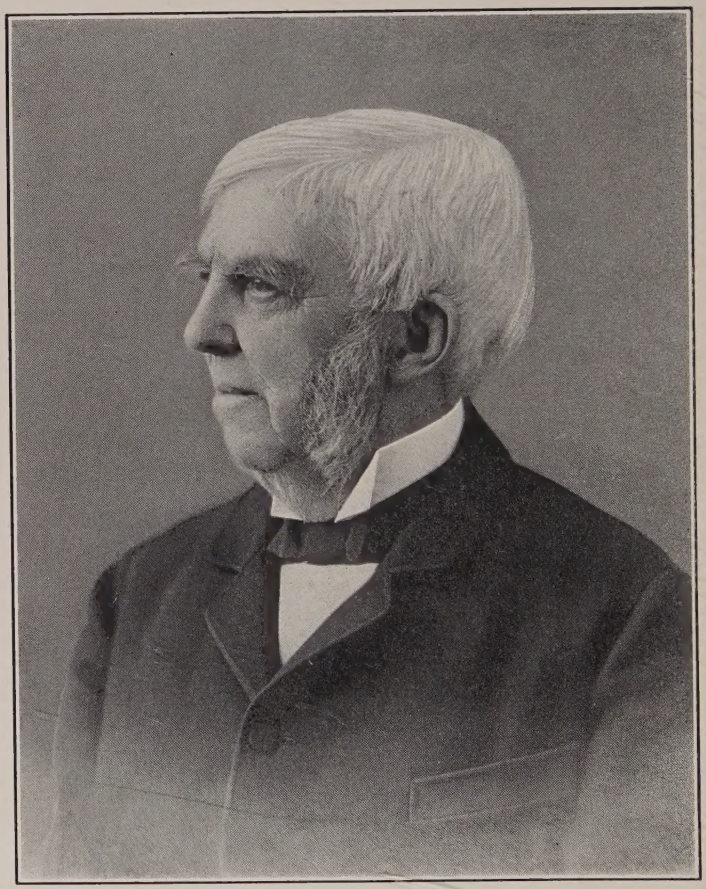
THE AUTOCRAT AND HIS FELLOW-BOARDERS



Oliver Wendell Holmes.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

THE AUTOCRAT AND HIS FELLOW-BOARDERS

BY

SAMUEL McCHORD CROTHERS

WITH SELECTED POEMS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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CONTENTS

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES:

THE AUTOCRAT AND HIS FELLOW-BOARDERS 1

SELECTED POEMS

OLD IRONSIDES (1830) 41

THE CAMBRIDGE CHURCHYARD (1836) 42

THE LAST LEAF (1831) 47

THE HEIGHT OF THE RIDICULOUS (1830) 49

THE DEACON'S MASTERPIECE (1858) 50

BILL AND JOE (1868) 55

WHAT WE ALL THINK (1858) 57

ROBINSON OF LEYDEN (1859) 59

A SUN-DAY HYMN (1859) 61

THE CROOKED FOOTPATH (1859) 62

THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS (1858) 64

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

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Dr. Holmes said of Emerson: "He delineates himself so perfectly in his various writings that the careful reader sees his nature just as it was in all its essentials, and has little more to learn than those human accidents which individualize him in time and space."

This was even more true of Dr. Holmes than of his friend. His life was singularly devoid of struggle. It was all of a piece. There were no dramatic surprises. It is in his writings that we see the man.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on August 29, 1809. His father, Rev. Abiel Holmes, minister of the First Church in Cambridge, was a man of distinction in his profession. A lover of the old ways, he took the conservative side in the controversy which divided his parish. In the old gambrel-roofed house the minister's son heard much argument about theology. Though he drifted away from the doctrines of his

father, he never lost interest in the discussions of matters of faith. It was a characteristic remark of the Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table that "we are all theological students and more of us are qualified as doctors of divinity than have received degrees at any of the universities." This was certainly true of those who breathed the atmosphere of Cambridge during the early years of the Unitarian controversy.

It was natural that the orthodox minister's son should go to Phillips Academy, Andover, and then to Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1829. There was one year of flirtation with the pages of Chitty and Blackstone in the Law School at Cambridge, but nothing serious came of it. Long afterwards Dr. Holmes wrote: "In that fatal year I had my first attack of authors' lead-poisoning, and I have never got quite rid of it from that day to this. But for that I might have applied myself more diligently to my legal studies, and carried a green bag in place of a stethoscope and a thermometer up to the present day." Medicine was preferred as being a less jealous mistress than the law. Then followed three years of study

in France. It was characteristic that on landing at Calais he sought out the hotel immortalized by Sterne in the "Sentimental Journey." Holmes and Sterne had much in common, and each felt an intellectual kinship with the French.

Returning to Boston, he began the practice of medicine, which by a natural transition passed into the work of medical instructor. In 1847 he received the appointment of Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Medical School of Harvard University. This position he held for thirty-five years. It is difficult for the public to hold two thoughts of any man at the same time. The obvious fact that Dr. Holmes was a wit has obscured the other fact that in his own profession he attained distinction as a painstaking and keen-eyed man of science. There is ample testimony to this from those competent to give an opinion, and even the general reader who will look into the "Medical Essays" may be convinced. A paper read before the Boston Society for Medical Improvement in 1843, on "The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever," awakened

physicians to dangers to which they had been oblivious and led to a revolution in their methods.

But though as a professor Dr. Holmes attained a high degree of success, it was as a man of letters that he gained fame. There were, however, no eccentricities of genius to record, nor any paragraphs to find a place in a book on the "Calamities of Authors." Still less did he furnish any materials for a collection of "The Quarrels of Authors."

He began to write in college and continued till in extreme old age his pen dropped from his hand, but he never in any strict sense wrote for the public. His last sentence in "Our Hundred Days in Europe" is suggestive. "If . . . this account of our summer experiences is a source of pleasure to many friends, and of pain to no one, as I trust will prove to be the fact, I hope I need never regret giving to the public the pages which are meant more especially for readers who have a personal interest in the writer."

The fact was that he had always been writing for this class of readers. A circle of per-

sonal friends had surrounded him, and the circle had grown larger with the years.

He was not a poet in the usual sense of the word. "The Chambered Nautilus" is perhaps the only bit of his verse which has the artistic completeness which enables it to stand alone. He had a poetical gift and he used it for the amusement and comfort of his friends, without much thought of the verdict of posterity. His poems were meant to be read by himself to his friends.

In 1836, only a year after his return from Europe, he published his first volume of poetry. "Old Ironsides," "The Last Leaf," "The Height of the Ridiculous" gave a taste of his quality. It became known that there was a young doctor living in Boston who had a whimsical fancy and who never dared to write as funny as he could. Henceforth on every festive occasion the attempt was made to draw him out. For almost fifty years he was the Poet Laureate of Boston, ready to produce verses for every important occasion. There is "A Modest Request" complied with after the Dinner at President Everett's Inauguration;

there is a Rhymed Lesson, delivered before the Boston Mercantile Library Association; there is a Medical Poem taken as an after-dinner prescription by the Medical Society. There are poems written for fairs, poems on the dedication of cemeteries, poems on the birthdays of distinguished citizens, poems on their going to Europe, poems of welcome to illustrious visitors, and always the poems for the reunions of the Class of '29.

Had Dr. Holmes died before reaching the age of forty-seven, he would have been remembered as a brilliant member of a remarkable group of literary men. Yet still he would have been reckoned among "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown." He had written many clever verses, but he had not yet found the medium for the full expression of himself.

He had written many short poems, he afterwards wrote several novels; but his literary reputation rests on "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" (including under that title the three volumes of The Breakfast-Table Series). The reader always thinks of Dr. Holmes as "The Autocrat." The title of the work is a jus-

tification for the reader's assumption that the author and his hero are one: "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table: Every Man his Own Boswell." By this title criticism is disarmed and we are told just what to expect. If we wish to know what manner of man Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was, we have only to look within.

To say that he was his own Boswell is but to say that he was by instinct not an historian or a novelist or a systematic philosopher, but an essayist. Now the great difficulty with the discursive essay lies in the fact that it encounters the social prejudice against the use of the first person singular. It is not considered good form for a man to talk much about himself. The essayist is not really more egotistic than the most reticent of his fellow-citizens, but the first person singular is his stock-in-trade. If he is not allowed to say "I," his style stiffens into formalism. He is interested in the human mind, and likes to chronicle its queer goings on. He is curious about its inner working. Now it happens that the only mind of which he is able to get an inside view is his

own, and so he makes the most of it. He follows his mind about, taking notes of all its haps and mishaps. He is aware that it may not be the best intellect in the world, but it is all he has, and he cannot help becoming attached to it. A man's mind grows on acquaintance. For a person to be his own Boswell implies that he is his own Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson must have enough opinions, obstinacies, and insights to make the Boswellizing worth while. The natural history of a mental vacuum cannot be made interesting to the general reader.

For commercial purposes it is sometimes necessary to create an artificial person, called the corporation, to carry on business. In like manner, the essayist finds it convenient to create an artificial person to carry on the business of self-revelation. As the corporation is relieved of the necessity of having a soul, so the artificial literary character is without self-consciousness. He can say "I" as often as he pleases, without giving offense. If a narrow-minded person accuses the author of being egotistic, he can readily prove an alibi. If

Elia should prove garrulous in proclaiming his whims, Mr. Charles Lamb could not be blamed. He was attending faithfully to his duties in the East India House.

Dr. Holmes was fortunate, not only in creating a character through which to put forth his private opinions, but also in providing that character with the proper environment. He was thus enabled not only to reveal himself, but also to reveal the society of which he formed a part.

Washington Irving's Geoffrey Crayon was only the English Mr. Spectator transplanted to America. The elderly man about town was more fitted for London than for the New York of that period. But Dr. Holmes hit upon a character and a situation distinctly American. Let Philosophy come down from the heights, and take up her abode in a Boston boarding-house. Let there be a nervous landlady anxious to please, and an opinionated old gentleman ready to be displeased, and a poet, and a philosopher, and a timid school-mistress, and a divinity-student who wants to know, and an angular female in black bombazine, and a young fellow named John who cares for none

of these things. Then let these free-born American citizens be talked to by one of their fellow-boarders who has usurped the authority of speech.

The philosophical historian of the future may picture the New England of the middle of the nineteenth century under the symbolism of the Autocrat and his Boarding-House. You cannot understand one without the other. In Europe different streams of culture flow side by side without mingling. One man belongs to the world of art, another to the world of business, another to the world of politics. Each sphere has its well-recognized conventions.

Matthew Arnold voices the inherited ideal. It is that of one who, in the society which he has chosen, is not compelled to note "all the fever of some differing soul." In America, to note the fever of some differing soul is part of the fun. We like to use the clinical thermometer and take one another's temperature.

We do not think of ourselves as in an intellectual realm where every man's house is his castle. We are all boarders together. There are no gradations of rank, nobody sits below

the salt. We listen to the Autocrat so long as we think he talks sense; and when he gets beyond our depth we push back our chairs somewhat noisily, and go about our business. The young fellow named John is one of the most important persons at the table. The Autocrat would think it his greatest triumph if he could make the slightest impression on that imperturbable individual.

The first sentence of the book strikes the keynote. "I was just going to say, when I was interrupted." Here we have the American philosopher at his best. He is inured to interruptions. He is graciously permitted to discourse to his fellow-citizens on the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, but he must be mighty quick about it. He must know how to get in his words edgewise.

"Will you allow me to pursue this subject a little further?" asks the Autocrat. Then he adds meekly, "They did n't allow me." When he attempts to present a subject in systematic form: "Oh, oh, oh!" cried the young fellow whom they call John, "that is from one of your lectures!"

For all his autocratic airs, there is no danger that he will be allowed to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. The boarders will take care to prevent such a calamity. All his sentimentalities and sublimities are at once subjected to the nipping air of the boarding-house.

When the Professor makes a profound statement, the "economically organized female in black bombazine" remarks acidly, "I don't think people who talk over their victuals are likely to say anything great."

We must remember that the lady in black bombazine was a very important person in her day. And so was another boarder, known as the "Model of all the Virtues." We are made intimately acquainted with this excellent lady, though we are not told her name. She was the "natural product of a chilly climate and high culture." "There was no handle of weakness to take hold of her by; she was as unseizable, except in her totality, as a billiard-ball; and on the broad, green, terrestrial table, where she had been knocked about, like all of us, by the cue of Fortune, she glanced from

every human contact, and 'caromed' from one relation to another, and rebounded from the stuffed cushion of temptation, with . . . exact and perfect angular movements."

To get the full humor of the talk, one must always hear the audacities of the Autocrat answered by the rustle of the bombazine and the grieved resignation of the Model of all the Virtues. It was all so different from what they had been accustomed to. In the first part of the nineteenth century a great wave of didactic literature swept over the English and American reading public. A large number of conscientious ladies and gentlemen simultaneously discovered that they could write improving books, and at once proceeded to do so. Their aim was to make the path of duty so absolutely plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein; and they succeeded. The wayfaring man who was more generously endowed had a hard time of it by reason of the advice that was thrust upon him. The cult of the Obvious was at its height in the days when Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy" was popularly supposed to be poetry,

and Mr. G. P. R. James furnished the excitement of Romance without any of its imaginative perils. The idea was that everything had to be explained.

When most of his characters are in the direst extremities in the Bastille, Mr. James begins a new chapter thus: "Having now left the woodman as unhappy as we could wish, and De Blenau very little better off than he was before, we must proceed with Pauline, and see what we can do with her in the same way. It has already been said in the hurry of her flight she struck her foot against a stone and fell. This is an unpleasant accident at all times, and more especially when one is running away."

While the romancer was so careful that the reader should understand what happened and why, the moralist was even more apprehensive in regard to his charges. In any second-hand store you find the shelves still cluttered up with didactic little books published anywhere from 1800 to 1860, called "Guides" or "Aids" to one thing or another. They were intended to make everything perfectly intel-

ligible to the intellectually dependent classes. The "Laborer's Guide," the "Young Lady's Aid," the "Parents' Assistant," the "Afflicted Man's Companion," were highly esteemed by persons who liked to have a book to tell them to go in when it rained. When I came across the "Saloon-Keeper's Companion" I felt sure that it belonged to this period, and so it did. Even the poor saloon-keeper was not allowed to take anything for granted.

To persons brought up on the Bombazine school of literature, Dr. Holmes's style was very perplexing. Instead of presenting an assortment of ready-made thoughts, each placed decently on the counter with the mark-down price in plain figures, he allowed the reader to look into his mind and see how he did his thinking. He described to the bewildered boarding-house the exciting mental processes.

"Every event that a man would master must be mounted on the run, and no man ever caught the reins of a thought except as it galloped by him. So . . . we may consider the mind as it moves among thoughts or events, like a circus-rider whirling round with a great

troop of horses. He can mount a fact or an idea, and guide it more or less completely, but he cannot stop it. . . . He can stride two or three thoughts at once, but not break their steady walk, trot, or gallop. He can only take his foot from the saddle of one thought and put it on that of another. What is the saddle of a thought? Why, a word, of course."

This sounds like what in these days we call the New Psychology. But to many of the boarders the act of thinking in public seemed indecorous. They were shocked at the idea of the mind making an object of itself, skipping about from one subject to another, like a circus-rider. In the most esteemed literature of the day, this never happened. A thought was never allowed to go abroad unless chaperoned by an elderly and perfectly reliable Moral.

When the Autocrat presented a new thought to the Breakfast-Table, " 'I don't believe one word of what you are saying,' spoke up the angular female in black bombazine."

Dr. Holmes has been called provincial. This is high praise for one who aspires to be

his own Boswell. Said Dr. Johnson, "He who is tired of London is tired of life." — "Why Sir, Fleet Street has a very animated appearance, but I think the full tide of human existence is at Charing Cross."

An interesting personality is always interested in the place where he happens to be. Dr. Holmes found his Fleet Street and Charing Cross within easy walking distance. All the specimens of human nature which he needed for his study could be found on Boston Common. Boston was not so big as London, nor so old, but it was sufficient for his active mind.

In that most delightful of nature books, Gilbert White's "Natural History of Selborne," the good rector says of the range of hills that ran through the parish which was his world, "Though I have travelled the Sussex Downs upwards of thirty years, yet I still investigate that chain of majestic mountains with fresh admiration year by year, and think I see new beauties every time I traverse it."

The globe-trotter smiles superciliously when he is told that these majestic mountains rise to the height of five hundred feet. But the

globe-trotter may well ask himself whether he has really seen as much of the world as Gilbert White saw in his thirty years' travels through the length and breadth of the Parish of Selborne.

When the "jaunty-looking person, who had come in with the young fellow they call John" made his famous remark about the Bostonian belief that "Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system," the Autocrat accepted it good-naturedly. "Sir, — said I, — I am gratified with your remark. It expresses with pleasing vivacity that which I have sometimes heard uttered with malignant dulness. The satire of the remark is essentially true of Boston, — and of all other considerable, — and inconsiderable, — places with which I have had the privilege of being acquainted. . . . I have been about, lecturing, you know, and have found the following propositions true of all of them.

"1. The axis of the earth sticks out visibly through the centre of each and every town or city.

"2. If more than fifty years have passed

since its foundation, it is affectionately styled by the inhabitants the '*good old* town of'— (whatever its name may happen to be).

"3. Every collection of its inhabitants that comes together to listen to a stranger is invariably declared to be a 'remarkably intelligent audience.'

"4. The climate of the place is particularly favorable to longevity.

"5. It contains several persons of vast talent little known to the world. . . .

"Boston is just like other places of its size;— only, perhaps, considering its excellent fish-market, paid fire-department, superior monthly publications, and correct habit of spelling the English language, it has some right to look down on the mob of cities."

That was in 1857. Since then the fish-markets and fire-departments and monthly magazines of other cities have improved, and nobody pretends any longer to know what is the correct way of spelling the English language. All the offensive Bostonian claims to superiority have passed away.

In "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table"

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we have many glimpses of the intelligent and right-minded, but somewhat self-conscious Boston of the Transcendental period. Dr. Holmes's wit was a safety match which struck fire on the prepared surface of the box in which it came. Boston was the box.

The peculiarities which he found most amusing were those which he himself shared. There is indeed an old prudential maxim to the effect that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. This ill-natured saying takes for granted that we should all enjoy smashing our neighbors' glass if we could insure the safety of our own. Dr. Holmes was of a different disposition. His satire, like his charity, began at home. He was quite proud of the glass house in which he lived, and at the same time he enjoyed throwing stones. If he broke a window now and then it was a satisfaction to think that it was his own. No one valued more highly the intellectual characteristics of Boston, but he also saw the amusing side of the local virtues. You may have watched the prestidigitator plunge his hand into a bowl of burning ether, and hold it aloft

like a blazing torch. There was a film of moisture sufficient to protect the hand from the thin flame. So Dr. Holmes's satire played around the New England Conscience and did not the least harm to it.

A Scotch Presbyterian of the seventeenth century, named Baillie, wrote a description of the English Puritans at the time when many were crossing to New England. "They are a people inclinable to singularities, their humor is to differ from all the world, and shortly from themselves." It was this hereditary humor, somewhat stimulated by the keen winds from off Massachusetts Bay, that furnished Dr. Holmes with his best material.

"I value a man," says the Autocrat, "mainly for his primary relations with truth, as I understand truth."

Such an assertion of independent judgment could not fail to awaken other independent boarders to opposition.

"The old gentleman who sits opposite got his hand up, as a pointer lifts his forefoot, at the expression, 'his relations with truth, as I understand truth,' and when I had done, sniffed

audibly, and said I talked like a transcendentalist. For his part, common sense was good enough for him.

"Precisely so, my dear sir, I replied; common sense, *as you understand it.*"

It was a discussion which had been carried on without interruption since the days when old Mr. Blackstone settled on the peninsula at the mouth of the Charles in order to get into primary relations with truth as he understood truth, and had his peace disturbed by the influx of people from Salem who came with the intention of getting into primary relations with truth as they understood it.

In Sunday preachments, in Thursday lectures, in councils and town meetings, in lecture-halls and drawing-rooms, the quest has been kept up. Mrs. Anne Hutchinson here got into primary relations with truth as she understood truth, and so did Margaret Fuller, and so has Mrs. Eddy.

Never has any one who had done this lacked followers in the good old town, and never has such an one lacked candid critics. So long as there is a keen delight in the give-and-take,

the thrust and counter-thrust of opinion, that "state of mind" that is Boston will be recognized.

It was a state of mind that was particularly acute in those days when Lowell wrote of Theodore Parker and his co-religionists, —

> I know they all went
> For a general union of total dissent:
> He went a step farther; without cough or hem,
> He frankly avowed he believed not in them;
> And, before he could be jumbled up or prevented,
> From their orthodox kind of dissent he dissented.

Laurence Sterne, in "Tristram Shandy," gives the secret of his own method of writing. "In course," said Yorick, "in a tone two parts jest and one part earnest." Dr. Holmes used these ingredients, but the proportions were reversed. Usually there are two parts earnest and one part jest. The earnest was always the earnest of the man of science, and of the keen physician. We are reminded of the kind of writing which Lord Bacon wished to see; "sober satire; or the insides of things." Much of his wit is of the nature of a quick diagnosis. We are moral hypochondriacs, going about

with long faces imagining that we are suffering from a complication of formidable diseases. The little doctor looks us over and tells us what is the matter with us. The incongruity between what we thought was the matter and what is the matter, makes us smile. It is as if a man thought he had committed the unpardonable sin, and was told that the real sin that has produced his bad feelings was committed by his cook.

Here is a bit of social diagnosis: "There are persons who no sooner come within sight of you than they begin to smile, with an uncertain movement of the mouth, which conveys the idea that they are thinking about themselves, and thinking, too, that you are thinking they are thinking about themselves."

We are made to see that the troublesome complaint which we usually speak of as self-consciousness is not so simple as we had thought. It is a complication of disorders. It is not merely a consciousness of one's self. It is the consciousness of other people's consciousness that makes the trouble. All of which is amusing because it is true.

"There is no power I envy so much, — said the divinity-student, — as that of seeing analogies and making comparisons. I don't understand how it is that some minds are continually coupling thoughts or objects that seem not in the least related to each other, until all at once they are put in a certain light and you wonder that you did not always see that they were as like as a pair of twins. It appears to me a sort of miraculous gift."

Now, to the Autocrat it was not a miraculous gift at all. To couple ideas into a train of thought was as easy for him as it is for a railroad man to couple cars. But the connections which he saw were not like the analogies of the homilist, they were like the connection which the physician recognizes between the symptom and the disease: this thing means that.

That there is any likeness between an awkward visitor and a ship is not evident till it is pointed out; after that it seems inevitable.

"Don't you know how hard it is for some people to get out of a room after their visit is really over? They want to be off, and you

want to have them off, but they don't know how to manage it. One would think they had been built in your parlor or study, and were waiting to be launched."

Then follows the suggestion as to the best way of launching them. "I have contrived a sort of ceremonial inclined plane for such visitors, which being lubricated with certain smooth phrases, I back them down, metaphorically speaking, stern-foremost, into their 'native element,' the great ocean of out-doors."

Whoever has felt himself thus being launched recognizes the accuracy of the figure of speech.

Even the most confirmed dogmatist must get a glimpse of the meaning of "the relativity of knowledge," and of the difference between opinion and truth, when the Professor at the Breakfast-Table explains it to him. "Do you know that every man has a religious belief peculiar to himself? Smith is always a Smithite. He takes in exactly Smith's-worth of knowledge, Smith's-worth of truth, of beauty, of divinity. And Brown has from time immemorial been trying to burn him, to excommunicate him, to anonymous-article him, because he did

not take in Brown's-worth of knowledge, truth, beauty, divinity. He cannot do it, any more than a pint-pot can hold a quart, or a quart-pot be filled by a pint. Iron is essentially the same everywhere and always; but the sulphate of iron is never the same as the carbonate of iron. Truth is invariable, but the *Smithate* of truth must always differ from the *Brownate* of truth."

When one has begun to state his political or theological opinions in terms of chemistry, and is able to grasp the idea of a *Smithate* of truth, he is on good terms with Dr. Holmes. He may go on to apply the same methods to literary criticism. "I suppose that a man's mind does in time form a neutral salt with the elements of the universe for which it has special elective affinities. In fact, I look upon a library as a kind of mental chemist's shop, filled with the crystals of all forms and hues which have come from the union of individual thought with local circumstances or universal principles. When a man has worked out his special affinities in this way, there is an end of his genius as a real solvent. No more effer-

vescence and hissing tumult as he pours his sharp thought on the world's biting alkaline unbeliefs."

The Autocrat was asked by one of the boarders whether he did n't "read up" for his talks at the breakfast-table. "No, that is the last thing I would do. . . . Talk about those subjects you have had long in your mind. . . . Knowledge and timber should n't be much used till they are seasoned."

It is the impression of seasoned thought which comes as we read sentences which embody the results of a long experience. "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" was not easy to write; no good book is. The writer who is unusually fluent should take warning from the instructions which accompany his fountain-pen: When this pen flows too freely it is a sign that it is nearly empty and should be filled.

In the maturity of his powers, Dr. Holmes jotted down his thoughts. The thoughts themselves had been long in his mind. "The idea of a man's 'interviewing' himself *is* rather odd, to be sure," says the Poet to the prosaic board-

ers. "But then that is what we are all of us doing every day. I talk half the time to find out my own thoughts, as a school-boy turns his pockets inside out to see what is in them. . . . It 's a very queer place, that receptacle a man fetches his talk out of. The library comparison does n't exactly hit it. You stow away some idea and don't want it, say for ten years. When it turns up at last it has got so jammed and crushed out of shape by the other ideas packed with it, that it is no more like what it was than a raisin is like a grape on the vine, or a fig from a drum like one hanging on the tree. Then, again, some kinds of thoughts breed in the dark of one's mind like the blind fishes in the Mammoth Cave. We can't see them, and they can't see us; but sooner or later the daylight gets in, and we find that some cold, fishy little negative has been spawning all over our beliefs, and the brood of blind questions it has given birth to are burrowing round and under and butting their blunt noses against the pillars of faith we thought the whole world might lean on. And then, again, some of our old beliefs are dying out every year, and others feed

on them and grow fat, or get poisoned as the case may be."

Dr. Holmes perfected the small stereoscope for hand use. The invention was typical of the quality of his own mind. The stereoscope is "an optical instrument for representing in apparent relief and solidity all natural objects by uniting into one image two representations of these objects as seen by each eye separately." The ordinary prosaic statement of fact presents a flat surface. The object of thought does not stand out from its own background. We look through the eyes of Dr. Holmes and we have a stereoscopic view. A stereoscope may not have as great scientific value as a microscope or a telescope, but it is very interesting for all that. The stereoscopic mind makes an abstract idea seem real.

It is convenient for purposes of quotation to ignore the transparent fiction by which the "Autocrat" of the first series gives way to the "Professor," and then to the "Poet." Dr. Holmes the Professor of Anatomy and Dr. Holmes the Poet were the same person. The

Autocrat might change his title as the years passed by, but he could not change his identity.

Dr. Holmes, in the preface to "The Professor at the Breakfast-Table," disarms criticism by suggesting a falling off in interest. "The first juice that runs of itself from the grapes comes from the heart of the fruit, and tastes of the pulp only; when the grapes are squeezed in the press the flow betrays the flavor of the skin. If there is any freshness in the original idea of the work, if there is any individuality in the method or style of a new author, or of an old author on a new track, it will have lost much of its first effect when repeated."

Evidently the majority of readers have taken this view, for the Autocrat is read by many who have slight acquaintance with the Poet or the Professor. But though there may have been a loss in freshness, there was a gain in substance.

Dr. Holmes stood aloof from many of the "reforms" of his day. Yet he too was "a soldier in the battle for the liberation of humanity." In "The Professor at the Breakfast-

Table" there are keen thrusts against theological dogmatism and bigotry. No wonder that the book was for a time in danger of being placed on the Protestant "Index Expurgatorius." There was often consternation at the breakfast-table, and much shaking of heads. "It was undeniable that on several occasions the Little Gentleman had expressed himself with a good deal of freedom on a class of subjects which, according to the divinity-student, he had no right to form an opinion upon." And the Professor himself was no better.

Dr. Holmes lived to see the battle for religious toleration won, at least in the community in which he lived, and he says of the once startling opinions of the Professor, "What was once an irritant may now act as an anodyne, and the reader may nod over pages which, when they were first written, would have worked him into a paroxysm of protest and denunciation."

But it is in "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table" that we see Dr. Holmes fighting a battle which is still on. As he was an enemy of Bigotry, so he was an enemy of Pedantry.

Born in the same year with Darwin, he felt the change which was taking place in the ideals and methods of education. The old classical culture was giving way to the new discipline of science. As a scientific man, he sympathized with the new methods. But he perceived that as there was a pedantry of classical scholarship, so there was developing a scientific pedantry, which was equally hostile to any generous and joyous intellectual life.

In the preface to his last edition, he says: "We have only to look over the lists of the Faculties and teachers of our Universities to see the subdivision of labor carried out as never before. The movement is irresistible; it brings with it exactness, exhaustive knowledge, a narrow but complete self-satisfaction, with such accompanying faults as pedantry, triviality, and the kind of partial blindness which belongs to intellectual myopia."

One may go far before he finds anything more delicious than the conversations between the Scarabee, who knew only about beetles, and "the old Master," to whom all the world was interesting. "I would not give much to

hear what the Scarabee says about the old Master, for he does not pretend to form a judgment of anything but beetles, but I should like to hear what the Master has to say about the Scarabee." What the Master had to say was: "These specialists are the coral-insects that build up a reef. By and by it will be an island, and for aught we know may grow into a continent. But I don't want to be a coral-insect myself. . . . I am a little afraid that science is breeding us down too fast into coral-insects."

Here we have stated the problem which the new education is facing. How may we gain the results which come from highly specialized effort, without losing the breadth and freedom of a liberal education? We must have specialists, but we must recognize the occupational diseases to which they are liable, and we must find some way by which they may be saved from them.

The old Master's division of the intellectual world is worth our careful consideration. There are "one-story intellects, two-story intellects, three-story intellects with skylights.

All fact-collectors, who have no aim beyond their facts, are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize, using the labors of the fact-collectors as well as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict; their best illumination comes from above, through the skylight."

Dr. Holmes was pleading the same cause to which Wordsworth was devoted, the union of Science and Poetry in a new and higher type of culture. If there is to be fullness of life there must be the cultivation of

> The glorious habit by which sense is made
> Subservient still to moral purposes,
> Auxiliar to divine. That change shall clothe
> The naked spirit, ceasing to deplore
> The burthen of existence. Science then
> Shall be a precious visitant; and then,
> And only then, be worthy of her name;
> For then her heart shall kindle; her dull eye,
> Dull and inanimate, no more shall hang
> Chained to its object in brute slavery;
> But taught with patient interest to watch
> The processes of things, and serve the cause
> Of order and distinctness, not for this
> Shall it forget that its most noble use,
> Its most illustrious province, must be found

> In furnishing clear guidance, a support
> Not treacherous, to the mind's *excursive* power.

Amid the clatter of the dishes, this was the doctrine that was insisted upon at the Boston boarding-house. Be sure of your fact, define it well. But, after all, a fact is but the starting-point. It is not the goal. The great thing is the mind's "excursive power." Dr. Holmes's excursions were not so long as that of Wordsworth, but they were more varied, and how many unexpectedly interesting things he saw! Those who like to go a-thinking will always be glad that Dr. Holmes was obliging enough to be his own Boswell.

SELECTED POEMS

OLD IRONSIDES [1]

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon's roar; —

[1] This was the popular name by which the frigate Constitution was known. The poem was first printed in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, at the time when it was proposed to break up the old ship as unfit for service. I subjoin the paragraph which led to the writing of the poem. It is from the *Advertiser* of Tuesday, September 14, 1830: —

"*Old Ironsides.* — It has been affirmed upon good authority that the Secretary of the Navy has recommended to the Board of Navy Commissioners to dispose of the frigate Constitution. Since it has been understood that such a step was in contemplation we have heard but one opinion expressed, and that in decided disapprobation of the measure. Such a national object of interest, so endeared to our national pride as Old Ironsides is, should never by any act of our government cease to belong to the Navy, so long as our country is to be found upon the map of nations. In England it was lately determined by the Admiralty to cut the Victory, a one-hundred gun ship (which it will be recollected bore the flag of Lord Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar), down to a seventy-four, but so loud were the lamentations of the people upon the proposed measure that the intention was abandoned. We confidently anticipate that the Secretary of the Navy will in like manner consult the general wish in regard to the Constitution, and either let her remain in ordinary or rebuild her whenever the public service may require." — *New York Journal of Commerce.*

The poem was an impromptu outburst of feeling and was published the next day but one after reading the above paragraph. — Holmes.

The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more.

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,
And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
Or know the conquered knee; —
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
The eagle of the sea!

Oh better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
The lightning and the gale!

THE CAMBRIDGE CHURCHYARD

Our ancient church! its lowly tower,
Beneath the loftier spire,
Is shadowed when the sunset hour
Clothes the tall shaft in fire;
It sinks beyond the distant eye
Long ere the glittering vane,

High wheeling in the western sky,
Has faded o'er the plain.

Like Sentinel and Nun, they keep
Their vigil on the green;
One seems to guard, and one to weep,
The dead that lie between;
And both roll out, so full and near,
Their music's mingling waves,
They shake the grass, whose pennoned spear
Leans on the narrow graves.

The stranger parts the flaunting weeds,
Whose seeds the winds have strown
So thick, beneath the line he reads,
They shade the sculptured stone;
The child unveils his clustered brow,
And ponders for a while
The graven willow's pendent bough,
Or rudest cherub's smile.

But what to them the dirge, the knell?
These were the mourner's share, —
The sullen clang, whose heavy swell
Throbbed through the beating air;
The rattling cord, the rolling stone,
The shelving sand that slid,
And, far beneath, with hollow tone
Rung on the coffin's lid.

The slumberer's mound grows fresh and green,
Then slowly disappears;
The mosses creep, the gray stones lean,
Earth hides his date and years;
But, long before the once-loved name
Is sunk or worn away,
No lip the silent dust may claim,
That pressed the breathing clay.

Go where the ancient pathway guides,
See where our sires laid down
Their smiling babes, their cherished brides,
The patriarchs of the town;
Hast thou a tear for buried love?
A sigh for transient power?
All that a century left above,
Go, read it in an hour!

The Indian's shaft, the Briton's ball,
The sabre's thirsting edge,
The hot shell, shattering in its fall,
The bayonet's rending wedge, —
Here scattered death; yet, seek the spot,
No trace thine eye can see,
No altar, — and they need it not
Who leave their children free!

Look where the turbid rain-drops stand
In many a chiselled square;
The knightly crest, the shield, the brand
Of honored names were there; —

Alas! for every tear is dried
Those blazoned tablets knew,
Save when the icy marble's side
Drips with the evening dew.

Or gaze upon yon pillared stone,
The empty urn of pride;
There stand the Goblet and the Sun,[1] —
What need of more beside?
Where lives the memory of the dead,
Who made their tomb a toy?
Whose ashes press that nameless bed?
Go, ask the village boy!

Lean o'er the slender western wall,
Ye ever-roaming girls;
The breath that bids the blossom fall
May lift your floating curls,
To sweep the simple lines that tell
An exile's date and doom;
And sigh, for where his daughters dwell,
They wreathe the stranger's tomb.

And one amid these shades was born,
Beneath this turf who lies,
Once beaming as the summer's morn,
That closed her gentle eyes;

[1] The Goblet and the Sun (Vas-Sol), sculptured on a freestone slab supported by five pillars, are the only designation of the family tomb of the Vassalls. — HOLMES.

If sinless angels love as we,
Who stood thy grave beside,
Three seraph welcomes waited thee,
The daughter, sister, bride!

I wandered to thy buried mound
When earth was hid below
The level of the glaring ground,
Choked to its gates with snow,
And when with summer's flowery waves
The lake of verdure rolled,
As if a Sultan's white-robed slaves
Had scattered pearls and gold.

Nay, the soft pinions of the air,
That lift this trembling tone,
Its breath of love may almost bear
To kiss thy funeral stone;
And, now thy smiles have passed away,
For all the joy they gave,
May sweetest dews and warmest ray
Lie on thine early grave!

When damps beneath and storms above
Have bowed these fragile towers,
Still o'er the graves yon locust grove
Shall swing its Orient flowers;
And I would ask no mouldering bust,
If e'er this humble line,
Which breathed a sigh o'er others' dust,
Might call a tear on mine.

THE LAST LEAF[1]

I saw him once before,
As he passed by the door,
And again
The pavement stones resound,
As he totters o'er the ground
With his cane.

They say that in his prime,
Ere the pruning-knife of Time
Cut him down,
Not a better man was found
By the Crier on his round
Through the town.

But now he walks the streets,
And he looks at all he meets
Sad and wan,

[1] This poem was suggested by the appearance in one of our streets of a venerable relic of the Revolution, said to be one of the party who threw the tea overboard in Boston Harbor. He was a fine monumental specimen in his cocked hat and knee breeches, with his buckled shoes and his sturdy cane. The smile with which I, as a young man, greeted him, meant no disrespect to an honored fellow-citizen whose costume was out of date, but whose patriotism never changed with years. I do not recall any earlier example of this form of verse, which was commended by the fastidious Edgar Allan Poe, who made a copy of the whole poem which I have in his own handwriting. Good Abraham Lincoln had a great liking for the poem, and repeated it from memory to Governor Andrew, as the governor himself told me. — Holmes.

And he shakes his feeble head,
That it seems as if he said,
"They are gone."

The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has prest
In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said —
Poor old lady, she is dead
Long ago —
That he had a Roman nose,
And his cheek was like a rose
In the snow.

But now his nose is thin,
And it rests upon his chin
Like a staff,
And a crook is in his back,
And a melancholy crack
In his laugh.

I know it is a sin
For me to sit and grin
At him here;
But the old three-cornered hat,
And the breeches, and all that,
Are so queer!

And if I should live to be
The last leaf upon the tree
In the spring,
Let them smile, as I do now,
At the old forsaken bough
Where I cling.

THE HEIGHT OF THE RIDICULOUS

I WROTE some lines once on a time
In wondrous merry mood,
And thought, as usual, men would say
They were exceeding good.

They were so queer, so very queer,
I laughed as I would die;
Albeit, in the general way,
A sober man am I.

I called my servant, and he came;
How kind it was of him
To mind a slender man like me,
He of the mighty limb.

"These to the printer," I exclaimed,
And, in my humorous way,
I added, (as a trifling jest,)
"There 'll be the devil to pay."

He took the paper, and I watched,
And saw him peep within;
At the first line he read, his face
Was all upon the grin.

He read the next; the grin grew broad,
And shot from ear to ear;
He read the third; a chuckling noise
I now began to hear.

The fourth; he broke into a roar;
The fifth; his waistband split;
The sixth; he burst five buttons off,
And tumbled in a fit.

Ten days and nights, with sleepless eye,
I watched that wretched man,
And since, I never dare to write
As funny as I can.

THE DEACON'S MASTERPIECE

OR, THE WONDERFUL "ONE-HOSS SHAY"

A LOGICAL STORY

HAVE you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay,
That was built in such a logical way
It ran a hundred years to a day,
And then, of a sudden, it — ah, but stay,

THE DEACON'S MASTERPIECE

I'll tell you what happened without delay,
Scaring the parson into fits,
Frightening people out of their wits, —
Have you ever heard of that, I say?

Seventeen hundred and fifty-five.
Georgius Secundus was then alive, —
Snuffy old drone from the German hive.
That was the year when Lisbon-town
Saw the earth open and gulp her down,
And Braddock's army was done so brown,
Left without a scalp to its crown.
It was on the terrible Earthquake-day
That the Deacon finished the one-hoss shay.

Now in building of chaises, I tell you what,
There is always *somewhere* a weakest spot, —
In hub, tire, felloe, in spring or thill,
In panel, or crossbar, or floor, or sill,
In screw, bolt, thoroughbrace, — lurking still,
Find it somewhere you must and will, —
Above or below, or within or without, —
And that's the reason, beyond a doubt,
That a chaise *breaks down*, but does n't *wear out*.

But the Deacon swore (as Deacons do,
With an "I dew vum," or an "I tell *yeou*")
He would build one shay to beat the taown
'N' the keounty 'n' all the kentry raoun';
It should be so built that it *could n'* break daown:

"Fur," said the Deacon, " 't's mighty plain
Thut the weakes' place mus' stan' the strain;
'N' the way t' fix it, uz I maintain,
Is only jest
T' make that place uz strong uz the rest."

So the Deacon inquired of the village folk
Where he could find the strongest oak,
That could n't be split nor bent nor broke,—
That was for spokes and floor and sills;
He sent for lancewood to make the thills;
The crossbars were ash, from the straightest trees,
The panels of white-wood, that cuts like cheese,
But lasts like iron for things like these;
The hubs of logs from the "Settler's ellum," —
Last of its timber, — they could n't sell 'em,
Never an axe had seen their chips,
And the wedges flew from between their lips,
Their blunt ends frizzled like celery-tips;
Step and prop-iron, bolt and screw,
Spring, tire, axle, and linchpin too,
Steel of the finest, bright and blue;
Thoroughbrace bison-skin, thick and wide;
Boot, top, dasher, from tough old hide
Found in the pit when the tanner died.
That was the way he "put her through."
"There!" said the Deacon, "naow she'll dew!"

Do! I tell you, I rather guess
She was a wonder, and nothing less!

Colts grew horses, beards turned gray,
Deacon and deaconess dropped away,
Children and grandchildren — where were they?
But there stood the stout old one-hoss shay
As fresh as on Lisbon-earthquake-day!

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED; — it came and found
The Deacon's masterpiece strong and sound.
Eighteen hundred increased by ten; —
"Hahnsum kerridge" they called it then.
Eighteen hundred and twenty came; —
Running as usual; much the same.
Thirty and forty at last arrive,
And then come fifty, and FIFTY-FIVE.

Little of all we value here
Wakes on the morn of its hundredth year
Without both feeling and looking queer.
In fact, there's nothing that keeps its youth,
So far as I know, but a tree and truth.
(This is a moral that runs at large;
Take it. — You're welcome. — No extra charge.)

FIRST OF NOVEMBER, — the Earthquake-day, —
There are traces of age in the one-hoss shay,
A general flavor of mild decay,
But nothing local, as one may say.
There could n't be, — for the Deacon's art
Had made it so like in every part
That there was n't a chance for one to start.

For the wheels were just as strong as the thills,
And the floor was just as strong as the sills,
And the panels just as strong as the floor,
And the whipple-tree neither less nor more,
And the back crossbar as strong as the fore,
And spring and axle and hub *encore*.
And yet, *as a whole*, it is past a doubt
In another hour it will be *worn out!*

First of November, 'Fifty-five!
This morning the parson takes a drive.
Now, small boys, get out of the way!
Here comes the wonderful one-hoss shay,
Drawn by a rat-tailed, ewe-necked bay.
"Huddup!" said the parson. — Off went they.
The Parson was working his Sunday's text, —
Had got to *fifthly*, and stopped perplexed
At what the — Moses — was coming next.
All at once the horse stood still,
Close by the meet'n'-house on the hill.
First a shiver, and then a thrill,
Then something decidedly like a spill, —
And the parson was sitting upon a rock,
At half-past nine by the meet'n'-house clock, —
Just the hour of the Earthquake shock!
What do you think the parson found,
When he got up and stared around?
The poor old chaise in a heap or mound,
As if it had been to the mill and ground!
You see, of course, if you're not a dunce,

How it went to pieces all at once,—
All at once, and nothing first, —
Just as bubbles do when they burst.

End of the wonderful one-hoss shay.
Logic is logic. That 's all I say.

BILL AND JOE

Come, dear old comrade, you and I
Will steal an hour from days gone by,
The shining days when life was new,
And all was bright with morning dew,
The lusty days of long ago,
When you were Bill and I was Joe.

Your name may flaunt a titled trail
Proud as a cockerel's rainbow tail,
And mine as brief appendix wear
As Tam O'Shanter's luckless mare;
To-day, old friend, remember still
That I am Joe and you are Bill.

You 've won the great world's envied prize,
And grand you look in people's eyes,
With H O N. and L L. D.
In big brave letters, fair to see, —
Your fist, old fellow! off they go! —
How are you, Bill? How are you, Joe?

You 've worn the judge's ermined robe;
You 've taught your name to half the globe;
You 've sung mankind a deathless strain;
You 've made the dead past live again:
The world may call you what it will,
But you and I are Joe and Bill.

The chaffing young folks stare and say,
"See those old buffers, bent and gray, —
They talk like fellows in their teens!
Mad, poor old boys! That 's what it means," —
And shake their heads; they little know
The throbbing hearts of Bill and Joe! —

How Bill forgets his hour of pride,
While Joe sits smiling at his side;
How Joe, in spite of time's disguise,
Finds the old schoolmate in his eyes, —
Those calm, stern eyes that melt and fill
As Joe looks fondly up at Bill.

Ah, pensive scholar, what is fame?
A fitful tongue of leaping flame;
A giddy whirlwind's fickle gust,
That lifts a pinch of mortal dust;
A few swift years, and who can show
Which dust was Bill and which was Joe?

The weary idol takes his stand,
Holds out his bruised and aching hand,

WHAT WE ALL THINK

While gaping thousands come and go, —
How vain it seems, this empty show!
Till all at once his pulses thrill; —
'T is poor old Joe's "God bless you, Bill!"

And shall we breathe in happier spheres
The names that pleased our mortal ears;
In some sweet lull of harp and song
For earth-born spirits none too long,
Just whispering of the world below,
Where this was Bill and that was Joe?

No matter; while our home is here
No sounding name is half so dear;
When fades at length our lingering day,
Who cares what pompous tombstones say?
Read on the hearts that love us still,
Hic jacet Joe. *Hic jacet* Bill.

WHAT WE ALL THINK

That age was older once than now,
  In spite of locks untimely shed,
Or silvered on the youthful brow;
  That babes make love and children wed.

That sunshine had a heavenly glow,
  Which faded with those "good old days"
When winters came with deeper snow,
  And autumns with a softer haze.

That — mother, sister, wife, or child —
The "best of women" each has known.
Were school-boys ever half so wild?
How young the grandpapas have grown!

That *but for this* our souls were free,
And *but for that* our lives were blest;
That in some season yet to be
Our cares will leave us time to rest.

Whene'er we groan with ache or pain, —
Some common ailment of the race, —
Though doctors think the matter plain, —
That ours is "a peculiar case."

That when like babes with fingers burned
We count one bitter maxim more,
Our lesson all the world has learned,
And men are wiser than before.

That when we sob o'er fancied woes,
The angels hovering overhead
Count every pitying drop that flows,
And love us for the tears we shed.

That when we stand with tearless eye
And turn the beggar from our door,
They still approve us when we sigh,
"Ah, had I but *one thousand more!*"

Though temples crowd the crumbled brink
O'erhanging truth's eternal flow,
Their tablets bold with *what we think*,
Their echoes dumb to *what we know;*

That one unquestioned text we read,
All doubt beyond, all fear above,
Nor crackling pile nor cursing creed
Can burn or blot it: GOD IS LOVE!

ROBINSON OF LEYDEN

HE sleeps not here; in hope and prayer
His wandering flock had gone before,
But he, the shepherd, might not share
Their sorrows on the wintry shore.

Before the Speedwell's anchor swung,
Ere yet the Mayflower's sail was spread,
While round his feet the Pilgrims clung,
The pastor spake, and thus he said: —

"Men, brethren, sisters, children dear!
God calls you hence from over sea;
Ye may not build by Haerlem Meer,
Nor yet along the Zuyder-Zee.

"Ye go to bear the saving word
To tribes unnamed and shores untrod;

Heed well the lessons ye have heard
From those old teachers taught of God.

"Yet think not unto them was lent
All light for all the coming days,
And Heaven's eternal wisdom spent
In making straight the ancient ways;

"The living fountain overflows
For every flock, for every lamb,
Nor heeds, though angry creeds oppose
With Luther's dike or Calvin's dam."

He spake; with lingering, long embrace,
With tears of love and partings fond,
They floated down the creeping Maas,
Along the isle of Ysselmond.

They passed the frowning towers of Briel,
The "Hook of Holland's" shelf of sand,
And grated soon with lifting keel
The sullen shores of Fatherland.

No home for these! — too well they knew
The mitred king behind the throne; —
The sails were set, the pennons flew,
And westward ho! for worlds unknown.

And these were they who gave us birth,
The Pilgrims of the sunset wave,

A SUN-DAY HYMN

Who won for us this virgin earth,
And freedom with the soil they gave.

The pastor slumbers by the Rhine,—
In alien earth the exiles lie,—
Their nameless graves our holiest shrine,
His words our noblest battle-cry!

Still cry them, and the world shall hear,
Ye dwellers by the storm-swept sea!
Ye *have* not built by Haerlem Meer,
Nor on the land-locked Zuyder-Zee!

A SUN-DAY HYMN

Lord of all being! throned afar,
Thy glory flames from sun and star;
Centre and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near!

Sun of our life, thy quickening ray
Sheds on our path the glow of day;
Star of our hope, thy softened light
Cheers the long watches of the night.

Our midnight is thy smile withdrawn;
Our noontide is thy gracious dawn;
Our rainbow arch thy mercy's sign;
All, save the clouds of sin, are thine!

Lord of all life, below, above,
Whose light is truth, whose warmth is love,
Before thy ever-blazing throne
We ask no lustre of our own.

Grant us thy truth to make us free,
And kindling hearts that burn for thee,
Till all thy living altars claim
One holy light, one heavenly flame!

THE CROOKED FOOTPATH

Ah, here it is! the sliding rail
That marks the old remembered spot, —
The gap that struck our school-boy trail, —
The crooked path across the lot.

It left the road by school and church,
A pencilled shadow, nothing more,
That parted from the silver-birch
And ended at the farm-house door.

No line or compass traced its plan;
With frequent bends to left or right,
In aimless, wayward curves it ran,
But always kept the door in sight.

The gabled porch, with woodbine green, —
The broken millstone at the sill, —

THE CROOKED FOOTPATH

Though many a rood might stretch between,
The truant child could see them still.

No rocks across the pathway lie, —
No fallen trunk is o'er it thrown, —
And yet it winds, we know not why,
And turns as if for tree or stone.

Perhaps some lover trod the way
With shaking knees and leaping heart, —
And so it often runs astray
With sinuous sweep or sudden start.

Or one, perchance, with clouded brain
From some unholy banquet reeled, —
And since, our devious steps maintain
His track across the trodden field.

Nay, deem not thus, — no earthborn will
Could ever trace a faultless line;
Our truest steps are human still, —
To walk unswerving were divine!

Truants from love, we dream of wrath; —
Oh, rather let us trust the more!
Through all the wanderings of the path,
We still can see our Father's door!

THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
Sails the unshadowed main, —
The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,
And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
Before thee lies revealed, —
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,

Cast from her lap, forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings: —

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

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